

been waiting for a lifetime with you

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The post-TRC-ending gang lands in a new world where strange marks have appeared on their skin. What could they mean? How do they deal with this? They drink coffee, they cuddle, and overall have a good time of course.
Written for KuroFai Olympics 2020, Team Fluff, Prompt: Soulmate AU

Status: complete

Published: 2020-08-18

Words: 3175

Rated: Fiction T - Language: English - Genre: Romance - Characters: [Fai, Kurogane] Mokona, Syaoran - Reviews: 3 - Favs: 12 - Follows: 2

Original source: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/13675030/1/been-waiting-for-a-lifetime-with-you>

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When Fai woke the sun was still low on the horizon, casting long shadows across the still-sleeping city below their newly acquired apartment. Fai yawned and rolled over, reveling in the comfort of sleeping in a bed for the first time in a long while. The last few worlds had been less populated with humans and that meant roughing it with the sleeping bag Sakura had given him the last time they'd left Clow Country and it was just a tad too small to be any sort of comfortable. Fai pulled the blankets over his head, shielding his eyes from the warm light of the morning to get a bit more sleep.

He closed his eyes, content in the warmth of his new bed and the smell of fresh clean sheets, only to be rudely interrupted by a knock at his bedroom door. Fai let out a long sigh and rolled out of bed, a chill running through his spine as his feet hit the cold of the hardwood floor. The door handle turned just before Fai could get to it and Kurogane greeted him with his typical polite morning grunt that meant Syaoran had woken him up earlier than he wanted to be awake as well.

"Good morning, Kuro-sama ~ to what do I owe the pleasure of this early wake-up call?" Fai smiled, squeezing through the doorway past Kurogane to head toward the bathroom.

"Syaoran wants to hit the market and look around town," Kurogane said, running a hand through his hair.

"Of course," Fai grabbed a towel from beneath the sink before turning back to Kurogane, who was now leaning against the bathroom doorway, "but this early?"

Kurogane shrugged, "He wants to get ahead of the crowd."

"Alright," Fai sighed, closing his eyes for a second and silently wishing for one day where he could sleep in, "Give me twenty

minutes."

Kurogane gave him a look and Fai huffed at him, giving him a gentle push out of the bathroom doorway.

"I'll give you thirty minutes," Kurogane called, his tone clearly teasing as he walked down the hall toward his room.

Fai shut the bathroom door, a warm content filling his chest as he turned on the shower, adjusting until it was just warm enough to feel comfortable. He was smiling and he wasn't quite sure why, that warm feeling in his chest quickly turning into a nervous titter when he thought about it.

Fai shook his head and glanced in the mirror, checking over the still-healing wound he'd gotten in the last world. It wasn't as inflamed as it had been yesterday, which was a good sign. The skin was slowly turning to a lighter pink - there would be a scar, but it would be fine.

He scanned over the rest of his scars, running his thumb over a few of them when he spotted something distinctly *new* right below his collarbone. His face scrunched up as he examined it - dark red characters that had definitely not been there when they'd left the last world. He brushed his thumb over it, and it did not smudge, nor did the skin feel raised. Carefully, he placed two fingers over the marks and tested his magic against it. There was a faint trace of *something* he couldn't quite put his finger on, but it did not feel harmful or dark.

How odd. As he stared at the deep red lines, his brow furrowed. He'd seen this before. *Somewhere. Something like this...* He couldn't quite remember. He brushed his fingertip over the mark one last time and chalked it up to some weird new thing related to whatever world they'd managed to land in this time.

They set on their way to the market an hour later, exploring the streets of the city in the early light of the morning. Shops lined the streets of the downtown area, all with colorful signs and products advertised in big bay windows. Clothing stores, some small grocery

shops, a nice-looking book shop, an antiquity boutique, and - a combination bakery and coffee shop. Fai's eyes lit up and he let out an excited gasp. Kurogane set a hand on his shoulder and when Fai looked at him, he had a small smile on his face.

"Later," Kurogane said, and pointed over his shoulder at Syaoran, who was gazing excitedly through an antique shop window, "We can stop on the way back."

Fai grinned and nodded in response, following Kurogane as he headed into the antique shop.

Syaoran moved slowly around the shop, stopping at nearly every display to check out dusty artifacts and yellowing scrolls. Fai followed him around for a while, listening intently to Syaoran as he babbled on about the various trinkets he found particularly interesting. When he came across a barrel full of scrolls that seemed to be in Syaoran's native language, Fai let him be and wandered off to find Kurogane.

It took a while longer than Fai was willing to admit to actually find Kurogane, as he'd holed himself up in a little back corner of the shop that was almost unnoticeable from the main aisles. A little nook filled wall-to-wall with books of various shapes, sizes, and conditions. Kurogane had a few piled next to him, and while many of them looked like books Fai had seen him reading through their journey, the one currently open in Kurogane's lap was a bit... different.

The world they'd landed in seemed to be another where Kurogane's native language - or at least an approximation of it - was the primary written language. Scanning the page as Kurogane flipped to the next one, something finally clicked in Fai's mind - the odd mark he'd seen on his collarbone this morning was some sort of letter? word? that Fai had seen before when they'd been in Yama. If it were in Nihongo, maybe Kurogane would know what it meant -

"Oi, Mage," Kurogane grunted, snapping the book shut, "look at this." Kurogane held the book up to show him the cover and while

the cover was pretty cool - a bunch of bright, swirling patterns of reds and blues and purples - Fai had no idea what the cover said. The complexities of Nihongo (or at least what he assumed was Nihongo) were still lost on him.

Fai quirked an eyebrow and Kurogane just looked at him, then suddenly seemed to realize the confusion and cleared his throat, setting the book back down in his lap.

"I keep seeing and hearing mentions of this *thing* called 'One'," Kurogane said.

Fai narrowed his eyes and waved for Kurogane to move over so he could sit next to him, "The number one?"

"No," Kurogane sighed and flipped the book open again, "It seems to be a concept similar to..." Kurogane furrowed his brow and looked down at the book again. There was a small pause before he continued.

"We would call them 'Bonded'," Kurogane said, as though that explained everything. Fai raised an eyebrow, more confused than he was before.

"Bonded?"

"Two souls bound." Kurogane continued, "The kid has a weird mark on his neck. I thought it may have something to do with this new world. I think it's the 'mark of One' but the words are different from what I'm used to."

"What is the mark of One?" Fai frowned, his hand absently moving to cover the place where he'd found his weird mark earlier that day. Kurogane looked over at him as if he were perplexed as to why Fai was not understanding what he was saying.

"It's a mark that tells you who your Bonded is."

"Again. Bonded? What?" Fai asked, rubbing his temples. Something had to be getting lost in Mokona's translation of whatever Kurogane was trying to explain to him, otherwise, he was definitely going crazy.

Kurogane closed the book once more and looked at him, confused and apparently unhappy that he was having to explain this. Fai leaned back on the tiny loveseat and closed his eyes for a second.

"A soul that m-" Kurogane began, but he was promptly interrupted by Mokona bouncing into the little nook.

"FOUND THEM!" Mokona yelled at the top of her lungs and Syaoran appeared moments later, bundles of scrolls tucked under his arms.

"You done looking around, kid?" Kurogane coughed, glancing between Syaoran and Mokona. Syaoran nodded and started telling Kurogane about the scrolls he'd found.

Fai stood to follow them out of the nook and could see Kurogane's ears tint just the slightest bit red as he tucked the book he'd been reading under his arm.

They moved on to other shops to buy essentials for their stay, and then, finally, it was *time* . They headed into the coffee shop-bakery and the smell of fresh roasted coffee and bread made Fai smile. He stared at the large billboard menu above the counter and tried to parse out drinks that sounded familiar to ones he had already tried in other worlds. Eventually, he landed on a caramel latte.

"Do you guys want anything?" Fai asked as they secured a nice little booth next to the windows that lined the front of the shop.

"Small, *normal*, black coffee." Kurogane grunted, and Fai feigned offense. Kurogane placed a hand on his shoulder and looked him in the eyes, "None of the weird stuff you tried to get me to try last time. Just normal *liquid* coffee."

"Do you think they have anything like that milkshake I had in *Varen Country* ?" Syaoran asked.

"I'll see if I can find something similar. Mokona?" Fai smiled at Mokona and Mokona jumped down onto Fai's shoulder.

"I want some cake!" Mokona bounced on Fai's shoulder, "*Strawberry cake!*"

"Alright, I got it," Fai chuckled and handed Mokona over to Syaoran before heading off to order.

When he finally stepped into line there were only two people ahead of him. The display window next to the counter was filled with all sorts of different sweets: pies, cakes, cookies, puddings, and a swirled chocolate mousse that just looked delightful . *Sakura would probably like something like that*, Fai thought as he tried to decide whether he wanted a piece of cake.

The line moved on and Fai decided that yes, he did want a piece of cake. As he stepped up to the counter and gave a polite smile to the cashier, a loud gasp came from behind him. Fai whipped around, making himself aware of Kurogane and Syaoran's positions immediately, *just in case*. The gasp, however, was not the result of an incoming enemy or threat of any kind. It was a woman, very tightly gripping another woman's arm, her other hand covering her mouth as she breathily said something to her partner, tears pricking up at the corners of her eyes. Fai pointedly looked away, but he did hear a soft-spoken whisper from one of the women saying, "*My One.*"

My One. He glanced back over at the couple, who were now looking at each other as if something remarkable had happened. The taller of the two women was brushing her thumb over the skin of the smaller woman's forearm, lightly tracing over what looked like a tattoo . *A tattoo* that looked just like the mark he'd found on himself that morning.

Everything was just starting to piece together in his mind as the cashier cleared their throat behind him. Fai turned back around and gave the cashier the order.

"It is times like these when I miss my One," The cashier said as he smiled at Fai and wrote down their order, handing it off to the barista that would be preparing their drinks. *One*. As Fai handed over cash to pay for the drinks, he glanced over at his little makeshift family. Kurogane smiled at something Syaoran said, and Fai felt a small smile cross his own face as well.

Fai grabbed his change and moved to where the drinks would be set when they were finished, all the while glancing over his shoulder to keep an eye on everyone. Mokona had emerged from inside of Syaoran's bag and was now bouncing in front of Kurogane's face, trying to get him to put down the book he'd picked up out of their shopping bag from the antique shop.

Fai's name was called a few minutes later, and he made his way over to their little booth, distributing the drinks and pastries he'd picked out for them. Kurogane let him slide in to sit by the window on his side and Mokona settled down on Syaoran's side, eyes lighting up at the sight of the strawberries-and-cream cake Fai had gotten for her.

Fai felt warm in a pleasant sort of way and he couldn't seem to stop himself from smiling softly as he glanced around the table. Syaoran was happily enjoying his approximation of a milkshake while talking to Mokona about one of the scrolls he'd gotten from the antique shop and Kurogane slowly sipping away at his coffee, leafing through his book.

Kurogane glanced over at him when he noticed Fai staring and he rolled his eyes, flopping his arm across the back of the booth behind Fai's head as Fai took his first sip of coffee. His eyes fluttered closed as he savored it - warm and creamy and just the right amount of sweetness, topped off with a generous swirl of whipped cream.

The coffee complimented the slice of chocolate cake he'd chosen for himself - and yes, they'd be stopping here again before they left for the next world. Maybe he'd drag Kurogane here tomorrow morning under the guise of having forgotten something they needed for dinner.

Fai smiled to himself and sipped his coffee, leaning casually into Kurogane's side to catch another glance at the book he was reading. Kurogane sighed and Fai grinned up at him, adjusting so he could lean back into Kurogane's side and watch strangers pass by on the street until the sun began to set low on the horizon.

Dinner was quiet and Syaoran and Mokona head off to bed shortly after they're done with their food. Fai had cleared the table and Kurogane had surprisingly helped with dishes after dinner. Once the dishes were done, Fai decided to settle down on the balcony of their apartment with a glass of wine. The perfect ending to a nice day in a new world.

Fai set his wine glass down on the table beside the little bench they had set out on the balcony and touched his finger to the cork.

" *Løsne*," Fai whispered, and the cork loosened just enough so he could pull it out of the bottle. Smiling, he poured himself a glass, watching the lights of the city below twinkle in the dark. It was a pretty sight - though he would admit to finding most types of landscape pretty. Cities had their perks, as did rolling hills, flat plains, and snow-drift mountaintops.

Fai sipped his wine, letting the warmth of the alcohol settle in him, making him feel nice and heavy. Kurogane joined him after a few minutes, a bottle of sake cradled in his arm. Fai smiled at him as he approached and patted at the seat next to him on the bench.

"Having fun?" Kurogane asked, as he poured himself a cup of sake.

"Always when you're around, Kuro-rin," Fai laughed, leaning against Kurogane's shoulder as he took another sip of his wine. He could

feel Kurogane let out a long breath and glanced up at him. That same blush tinted his ears a dark pink, but this time Fai caught a glimpse of Kurogane's face, and he could tell he was full-on blushing.

Fai gasped mockingly and set his now-empty glass on the side table.

"Kuro-rin, are you *blushing*? " Fai teased, inching closer to Kurogane so he could playfully boop him on the nose.

"You're blushing too, idiot." Kurogane countered, reaching up to brush a surprisingly gentle thumb over Fai's cheek. And suddenly Fai was *really warm*, and he wasn't exactly sure if it was the alcohol that was making him feel like he was burning up. Kurogane's thumb traced Fai's jawline slowly, very obviously giving Fai time to move his hand away.

Fai leaned into the touch, heart speeding up as Kurogane's hand moved down to his neck and Fai looked up at him, stared directly into his eyes as Kurogane moved toward the collar of his shirt. And *gods, Fai had not felt this hot in his life*, as Kurogane tugged at the collar of Fai's V-neck, his thumb ghosting over the skin of his collarbone.

Kurogane's eyes flickered down to Fai's chest and Kurogane smirked, removing his hand. A sudden rush of anxiety hit Fai like a sudden ice bath.

"I knew it." Kurogane said, and Fai felt dread creep into his stomach and up into his throat. Fai sat up, his brain trying to make sense of what had just happened through the rush of confusion, anxiety, and alcohol in his system. He tried to stand, only to be pulled back down by Kurogane, who tucked him under his arm and securely held him in place.

" *What?*" Fai whispered, his voice barely audible, " *What is happening?*"

Kurogane slowly, carefully, brushed some hair behind Fai's ear and rolled up his right sleeve to his elbow.

"Look," Kurogane brought his right forearm closer and Fai was even more confused because that was his signature, plain as day, in blue ink scrawled across Kurogane's forearm.

"I'd know that bullshit swirly writing of yours anywhere, Mage," Kurogane said, running his fingertips over Fai's handwriting before reaching out to cover the spot just below Fai's collarbone, where his own mark lay beneath his shirt, "I'm surprised you didn't recognize mine."

Kurogane cupped his cheek, bringing Fai's focus to his face and forcing him to make eye contact.

"*Fai?*" Kurogane breathed, and suddenly everything clicked into place in Fai's mind. *Two souls bound. The mark of the One. Bonded. Soulbond. Soulmates.*

Fai's eyes widened, hands shooting up to cover Kurogane's, "We're *soulmates?*"

Kurogane looked at him for a long moment and pulled Fai close, burying his face in Fai's neck. Fai frowned as he felt Kurogane shake with poorly concealed laughter, patting him on the back of the head to get him to let go.

"Don't laugh at me, you were the one being vague with all that weird 'bonded' stuff," Fai scowled playfully, flicking Kurogane's forehead.

"Not my fault you can't read Nihongo. I've *tried* teaching you." Kurogane said, and Fai did try to come up with some sort of comeback, he really did. But his train of thought was interrupted by Kurogane's fingers running through his hair, tugging him forward. Kurogane's lips brushed against his, soft and delicate, and *perfect* in a way that Fai was not expecting. They looked at each other for

another long moment and Fai smiled as he pulled Kurogane into a long, slow kiss.